

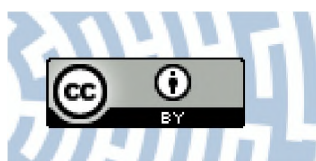


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## ON DEADJECTIVAL CONVERSION IN ENGLISH

Artykuł omawia proces konwersji w języku angielskim, nazywany także derywacją zerową. Opisane zostały dwa typy konwersji, w których podstawę stanowią przymiotniki: konwersja przymiotników w czasowniki (typ *dry* → *to dry*) oraz konwersja przymiotników w rzeczowniki (typ *empty* → *an empty*). Pokazano różnicę w ograniczeniach dotyczących obu rodzajów procesów.

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to consider selected aspects of conversion in English. This phenomenon can be defined as “the change in the part of speech of a form without any overt affix marking the change” (Bauer 1988:241). It is labelled “zero-derivation” by some researchers (including Marchand 1969), who postulate the existence of a phonologically null affix (i.e. zero-affix). The recognition of a zero-affix is justified by the occurrence of an overt suffix whose attachment results in the same type of semantic and syntactic changes of derivational bases. This can be exemplified by the comparison of the pair *to drive* – *a driver* (where the noun results from the attachment of the suffix *-er*) and the pair *to cook* – *a cook* (where the noun can be analysed as resulting from the attachment of a phonologically null nominalizing suffix, i.e.  $cook_V + \emptyset$ ).

The discussion below will focus on two types of conversion processes in which adjectives function as the input, namely conversion of adjectives into verbs and conversion of adjectives into nouns in English.

The outline of the paper is as follows. In section 2, a general overview of processes of conversion in English will be given. In section 3 some methods of identifying the direction of conversion will be mentioned. In

section 4 instances of adjective-to-verb conversion will be considered. Section 5 will be devoted to conversion of adjectives into nouns. Section 6 will deal with instances of recursive application of conversion processes. Conclusions will be offered in section 7.

## 2. Types of conversion processes in English

Let us consider some examples of conversion processes in English, given in (1-4) below. They involve a change of a major syntactic category of lexical items, namely conversion of verbs into nouns (in 1), conversion of nouns into verbs (in 2), conversion of adjectives into verbs (in 3) and conversion of adjectives into nouns (in 4).

- (1) *to drive* – *a drive*  
*to kick* – *a kick*  
*to look* – *a look*  
*to push* – *a push*
- (2) *a bottle* – *to bottle*  
*a hammer* – *to hammer*  
*a mother* – *to mother*  
*water* – *to water*
- (3) *clean* – *to clean*  
*dry* – *to dry*  
*empty* – *to empty*  
*narrow* – *to narrow*
- (4) *blind* – *blinds*  
*comic* – *a comic*  
*daily* – *a daily*  
*facial* – *a facial*  
*friendly* – *a friendly*

Verb-to-noun conversion and noun-to-verb conversion represent the most productive types of conversion processes in English, while the change of adjectives into verbs or into nouns is less productive.

Even less common are cases when closed-system items (cf. Quirk et al. 1973:19) undergo conversion into open-class lexemes. For example, verbs can be zero-derived from prepositions (in 5), or from conjunctions (in 6). Auxiliary verbs, including modals, can be converted into nouns (in 7).

- (5) *down – to down*  
       *up – to up*  
 (6) *but – to but*  
 (7) *must – a must*

One can also come across cases when a whole phrase becomes a noun or an adjective, as in the examples below (quoted from Quirk et al. 1973:442):

- (8) a. Whenever I gamble, my horse is one of the *also-rans*.  
       b. an *under-the-weather* feeling

Alternatively, a part of a lexeme can be converted into a noun, as in (9) (cf. Quirk et al. 1973:442)

- (9) Patriotisms, and any other *isms* you'd like to name.

Some authors (including Quirk et al. 1973) extend the notion of conversion to changes of secondary syntactic category. Thus, proper nouns may be reclassified as common nouns (e.g. *a Honda* 'a car manufactured by Honda'), countable nouns may be used as uncountable ones (e.g. *some inches of pencil*), or transitive verbs may be used intransitively (e.g. *Now it's time to eat*.)

### 3. Identifying the direction of conversion

Linguists who study the phenomenon of conversion often grapple with the problem of how to identify the direction of the process. In the case of affixation processes, the recognition of the base and the derivative is relatively easy, due to the difference in the morphological complexity of the two items. The affixal derivative is longer than its derivational base, as is shown by the comparison of the verb *drive* and the noun *driver*, or the adjective *legal* and the verb *legalize*. In conversion pairs, however, such as the verb *drive* and the noun *drive*, both members are identical in form.

There have been several methods of finding the basic member of a conversion pair proposed in the literature on the subject (cf. Marchand 1964, Cetnarowska 1993, Plag 2003). Firstly, the basic conversion mate is usually attested in written sources much earlier than the derivative. This criterion may be of little help if both items occurred in written texts at (roughly) the same time. For instance, the lexeme *claim* was first attested in English in 1300, both in the nominal and verbal use.

Another criterion which can be employed to find the basic member of a conversion pair is that of semantic dependence. The meaning of the verb

*to mother* can be stated as ‘to take care of someone as a mother does’. Since the verb *to mother* is semantically dependent on the noun, it can be treated as the derived member of the conversion pair *a mother – to mother*.

Furthermore, a conversion mate can be regarded as derived when it shows more specific (and more restricted) meanings than the other conversion mate. In the pair *to convert – a convert*, the verb exhibits a wider range of meanings, since one can talk about currency being converted, a sofa converting into a bed, or people converting to another religion. The meaning of the noun *convert* is restricted to the latter domain, as it denotes a person who changes his or her denomination.

The derived member of the conversion pair is typically used less commonly than the basic member. The verb *to siren* ‘to signal by means of a siren’, attested in the sentence *The police sired the Porsche to a stop*, occurs less commonly than the basic conversion mate, namely the noun *siren*. Similarly, the denominal verb *to neighbour* is employed mainly in the participial form *neighbouring* and is less frequent than its conversion mate, the noun *neighbour*. Additionally, the derived conversion mates may exhibit stylistic restrictions on their occurrence. The verb *to hunger* is felt to be poetic or literary, in contrast to its nominal base *hunger*.

The primary member of the conversion pair may serve as an input to affixation processes more frequently than the derived member. In the pair *a hand – to hand*, the noun is the basic conversion mate. It gives rise to a number of affixal derivatives, including the adjectives *handy*, *(left-) handed*, or the noun *handful*. The verb *to hand* is not likely to form affixal derivatives such as *\*handive*, *\*bandal*, or *\*bandant* (though *handable* can be attested).

The study of the stress contours of conversion mates can also provide some clues as to the direction of conversion. Verbs zero-derived from nouns typically retain the stress pattern of their bases, e.g. *a parachute* and *to parachute* are both stressed on their initial syllable. Zero-derived deverbal nouns often contrast in their stress pattern with related verbs: while the verb *remake* is stressed on the final syllable, the noun *remake* carries the primary stress on the initial syllable.

Finally, it may be instructive to consider the range of meanings of conversion mates to identify the primary member of the pair. The sense groups listed in (10) are mentioned in Plag (1999:220) as typical of converted (denominal or deadjectival) verbs:

- (10). a. locative verbs ‘to put (in)to X’: *jail*, *bottle*
- b. ornative verbs ‘to provide with X’: *staff*, *label*

- c. causative verbs 'to make (more) X': *yellow, wet*
- d. resultative verbs 'to make into X': *bundle, cripple*
- e. inchoative verbs 'to become X': *cool, dry*
- f. performative verbs 'to perform X': *counterattack, campaign*
- g. simulative verbs 'to act like X': *chauffer, pelican*
- h. instrumental verbs 'to use X': *hammer, guitar*
- i. privative verbs 'to remove X': *bark, bone*
- j. stative verbs 'to be X': *hostess, father*

Deverbal nouns, on the other hand, exhibit the following meanings (cf. Marchand 1969:374 ff, Cetnarowska 1993:86 ff.):

- (11) a. single instance of a process: *answer, bark*
- b. state, condition of being V-ed: *daze, defeat*
- c. process or state as a general phenomenon: *desire, distrust*
- e. result of V-ing: *bite, scratch*
- f. object of V-ing: *buy, convert*
- g. amount V-ed: *sip, swallow*
- h. one who V-s: *bore, cheat*
- i. something one can V with: *rattle, shave*
- k. something which V-s: *drain, surprise*
- l. place where one V-s or can V: *hunt, run*
- m. period of V-ing: *freeze, nap*
- n. range or extent of V-ing: *drop, jump*

Let us consider the conversion pairs *a stone – to stone* and *discharge – to discharge*. The verb *stone* denotes the activity of removing stones (*You must stone the cherries first*) or attacking with stones (*The women were stoned to death*). Consequently, it exhibits senses characteristic of converted verbs. The noun *discharge* can occur in the sense of 'action of sending something/somebody out' (*the day of discharge from hospital*) or 'substance that has come out of somewhere' (*My puppy has yellowish discharge from the eyes*). Such senses are typical of deverbal nouns. Consequently, the noun *stone* behaves as the primary member of the conversion pair *a stone – to stone* whereas the noun *discharge* shows the semantics of the deverbal derivative.

#### 4. Adjectives converted into verbs

Deadjectival zero-derived verbs in English tend to be transitive and exhibit the causative sense 'to make (more) X', e.g. *to blind* 'to make blind, to make unable to see' (*I was blinded by the light*), or *to dirty* 'to make (more) dirty' (*Their once colourful clothes were dirtied with mud*). Examples of common

transitive verbs zero-derived from adjectives in English are provided in (12), following Marchand (1969:371):

- (12) *bare, better, black, blind, blunt, busy, calm, clean, clear, cool, corrupt, dim, dirty, dry, dull, empty, even, foul, gentle, hollow out, humble, loose, lower, narrow, numb, open, perfect, ready, right, slow (down), smooth, sober, spruce (up), still, tame, tense, thin (out), tidy.*

Intransitive converted verbs, paraphrasable as ‘to become X’ are less numerous in English. A selection of them is given in (13) (cf. Marchand 1969:371):

- (13) *clear, dim, empty, faint, gray, idle, mellow, narrow, open, pale, slow, sober (up), supple (up), tense, thin.*

As is exemplified in (14), some deadjectival verbs are used both transitively and intransitively:

- (14) a. Women *narrow* the wage gap as men’s earnings shrink. (transitive verb)  
b. The income gap has *narrowed* during the past twenty years.

The perfectivizing particle (e.g. *up, down, out*) may accompany the converted transitive or intransitive verb to denote the achievement of the result state, as in (15):

- (15) a. You’d better *slow down*.  
b. I need time to *sober up* before going home.  
c. Scotland’s young binge drinkers need to *wise up*.  
d. I want to know if layers can *thin out* my hair.

The group of deadjectival converted verbs is much smaller than the class of nouns converted into verbs. Many converted verbs of deadjectival origin have become obsolete over time, e.g. *certain, hardy, hasty, honest, rich, weak, wide* (see Marchand 1969:371 for more examples).

Plag (1999:222) identifies the following deadjectival verbs as 20<sup>th</sup> century neologisms attested in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth abbreviated as *OED*):

- (16) *born, camp, cruel, dual, filthy, hip, lethal, main, multiple, phoney, polychrome, premature, pretty, romantic, rustproof, skinny, young.*

Illustrative examples of their verbal usage (including the gerundive usage) are provided below (mainly from Google searches):



- (17) a. The tides of welfare legislation flow and ebb with the aging and *younging* of electorates.  
 b. *Prematuring* and Other Potato Troubles  
 c. Laser heating and evaporation of glass and glass-*borning* materials  
 d. This first novel by Paul Estaver is no sitcom with a *phoneyed-up* representative cast and an agenda of must-cover events.  
 e. It does not mention about the paintball markers and we know it is not a *lethalled* barrel and it cannot explode.

As there are only 17 converted deadjectival verbs among 488 innovative verbs attested in the OED, Plag (1999) concludes that adjective-to-verb conversion is on the decline in English.

One reason for the infrequency of converted verbs is undoubtedly the greater productivity of verb-forming suffixes which can be added to adjectives, such as *-ify*, *-ate*, *-ize*. For instance, there are no verbs *\*to dental*, *\*to palatal*, *\*to velar* in the terminology of phonology since the institutionalized verbs in question terminate in *-ize*, e.g. *to dentalize*, *to palatalize*, *to velarize*. In other words, the hypothetical verb *\*to velar* is blocked by the existing suffixal derivative *to velarize*, where blocking can be defined as “the non-existence of a form due to the existence of a synonymous competing form” (Plag 1999:50). The potential deadjectival verbs *\*to false* and *\*to pure* are blocked by *-ify* derivatives, i.e. *falsify* and *purify*. The verbs *activate* and *domesticate* (which end in the suffix *-ate*) prevent the occurrence of the converted verbs *\*to active* and *\*to domestic*. Parallel suffixal and affixless verbs derived from the same adjectival base are predicted to occur when they show distinct meanings, e.g. *to clear* ‘to remove something that is unwanted’ (*Soldiers cleared the main roads*) vs. *to clarify* ‘to make something easier to understand’ (*Can you clarify the meaning of this word?*). However, Plag (1999) has come across the following (roughly) synonymous formations in the OED:

- (18) *to black* – *to blacken*  
*to dual* – *to dualize*  
*to pretty* – *to prettify*  
*to romantic* – *to romanticize*

This shows that blocking of synonymous items can be occasionally suspended, especially in the case of innovative derivatives, exemplified in (19).

- (19) a. *to dualize* F-11, G-11, F-10 roads  
 b. campaign continues for *dualling* of A1 Road  
 c. You need to *pretty up* the house.  
 d. *prettified* and attractive computer mice



Although the prefix *en-/em-* and the suffix *-en* are recognized as currently unproductive in Plag (1999), some of the obsolete deadjectival converted verbs may have died out due to the occurrence of suffixal, prefixal or prefixal-suffixal rival formations with those formatives:

- (20) adj. *bright* – *to embrighten* (obs. *to bright*)  
 adj. *rich* – *to enrich* (obs. *to rich*)  
 adj. *short* – *to shorten* (obs. *to short*)  
 adj. *weak* – *to weaken* (obs. *to weak*)

A question could be asked if any semantic or morphological classes of adjectives are prohibited from undergoing conversion into verbs. Gussmann (1987), in agreement with Marchand (1969), remarks that morphologically complex adjectives generally do not convert into verbs. Counterexamples to this generalization are rare but possible. This is shown by the institutionalized verbs given in (21) (cf. Marchand 1969:371)

- (21) a. *to bloody*, *to dirty*, *to muddy* (the suffix *-y*)  
 b. *to fireproof*, *to soundproof*, *to waterproof* (the combining element *-proof*)

as well as by 20<sup>th</sup> century verb neologisms attested in the *OED* by Plag (1999: 222):

- (22) *to filthy* (the suffix *-y*), *to partial* (the suffix *-al*), *to polychrome* (the prefix *poly-*),  
*to premature* (the prefix *pre-*), *to romantic* (the suffix *-ic*), *to rustproof* (the  
 combining element *-proof*), *to skinny* (the suffix *-y*).

The avoidance of suffixed adjectives as bases for converted verbs has a rational explanation. As observed in Marchand (1969: 372), suffixes are categorizers. In other words, they help the speaker to identify the syntactic category of the whole lexeme. For instance, English words terminating in *-ive* or *-ous* are typically adjectives, those ending in *-ify* or *-ize* are verbs while the occurrence of the word-final suffix *-ness* or *-ity* signals the status of the word as a noun. Conversion of such suffixed lexemes would result in the loss of such part-of-speech predictions. Therefore, morphologically complex words are not preferable bases for adjective-to-verb conversion, noun-to-verb conversion, or verb-to-noun conversion.

## 5. Adjective-to-noun conversion

The constraint against selection of derived lexemes as input to conversion does not seem to operate in the case of adjective-to-noun conversion.

As was shown in (4) in section 2 and is further illustrated in (23) below, adjectives which undergo conversion into nouns are frequently denominal or deverbal.

- (23) *adhere* (v.) – *adhesive* (adj.) – *adhesive* (n.) ‘a substance that makes objects stick together’  
*explode* (v.) – *explosive* (adj.) – *explosive* (n.) ‘a substance that can explode’  
*face* (n.) – *facial* (adj.) – *facial* (n.) ‘a treatment for the face, usually consisting of a massage and the application of cosmetic creams’  
*friend* (n.) – *friendly* (adj.) – *friendly* (n.) ‘a friendly match’  
*hope* (n.) – *hopeful* (adj.) – *hopeful* (n.) ‘a hopeful candidate’  
*perish* (v.) – *perishable* (adj.) – *perishables* (n.) ‘food that will go bad quickly’  
*vary* (v.) – *variable* (adj.) – *variable* (n.) ‘an attribute which may change its value’  
*week* (n.) – *weekly* (adj.) – *weekly* (n.) ‘a weekly magazine’

Even if the adjectives which become the input to conversion are not obviously denominal or deverbal (as in the case of morphologically complex words borrowed from Latin, e.g. *fugitive*), they can terminate in adjective-forming suffixes, e.g. *-ic*, *-ive*, *-ist*, *-ian*, *-ful*, *-ese*, *-ible/-able*, *-ly* or *-al*. Examples of various types of morphologically complex adjectives undergoing conversion into nouns are provided in (24). They can be roughly paraphrased as ‘a person or thing that shows the property of being X’, e.g. *a radical* ‘a person who has radical political views (and calls for a serious political or social change)’, *a superior* ‘someone who is superior in rank’.

- (24) a. *fugitive*, *laxative*, *demonstrative*  
 b. *capitalist*, *socialist*, *imperialist*  
 c. *adolescent*, *protestant*  
 d. *American*, *Anglican*, *Australian*, *Christian*,  
 e. *Catholic*, *narcotic*,  
 f. *Chinese*, *Japanese*, *Portuguese*  
 g. *radical*, *musical*, *homosexual*, *national*  
 h. *paranoid*, *superior*

It goes without saying that morphologically simple adjectives can also produce zero-derived nouns, as in (25). Such converted nouns may exhibit polysemy, or may be treated as semantically underspecified, as is shown for the lexeme *slow*.

- (25) *bitter* (adj.) – *bitter* (n.) ‘dark beer with a bitter taste’  
*black* (adj.) – *Black* (n.) ‘an African American’  
*calm* (adj.) – *calm* (n.) ‘a period or state when everything is calm’

- cool* (adj.) – *cool* (n.) ‘that which is cool’  
*empty* (adj.) – *empty* (n.) ‘an empty container’  
*red* (adj.) – *Red* (n.) ‘a communist’  
*slow* (adj.) – *slow* (n.) ‘a slow train; a slow-paced horse; a slow-going person; a slow tune’  
*wet* (adj.) – *wet* (n.) ‘moisture; liquid or moist substance’

Let us note that Marchand (1969) does not identify adjective-to-noun conversion as a subtype of zero-derivation in English. This is because he regards the nominal use of the lexemes given in (24) and (25) as a case of ellipsis of the head noun in an adjective+noun phrase, i.e. *bitter* (*beer*), *Chinese* (*language*), *American* (*national*), *weekly* (*magazine*), *slow* (*train*). For Marchand (1969) this is a syntactic process, not a word-forming operation.

However, there is yet another phenomenon in English which is a better candidate for a syntactic category-changing process. This is the nominal usage of adjectives preceded by the definite article, as in (26):

- (26) a. *The rich* do not understand *the poor*.  
 b. *The homeless* need help.  
 c. *The poorest* were the most honest.  
 d. *The unemployed* staged a peaceful protest.  
 e. A distinction must be made between vagrant beggars and *the truly homeless*.  
 f. *The very poor* need more help than charity alone.

In (26), the adjective temporarily “takes over” the function of the ellipsed head noun *people*. The temporariness of this change may be underlined by the presence of the inflectional endings typical of adjectives, e.g. the marker of the comparative or the superlative degree, or the occurrence of adverbial modifiers, such as *very*, or *truly*. Quirk et al. (1972:1010) refer to this phenomenon as “partial conversion” since in spite of performing the role of a noun in a sentence the adjective does not lose its adjectival properties, such as the choice of modifiers or inflectional endings.

The lexemes *a hopeful*, *a facial* or *an empty* represent, in contrast, “full” (i.e. lexical) conversion. They show the inflectional properties of nouns as they can occur with the plural ending –s, e.g. empties, Blacks, hopefuls. They can be premodified by numerals, determiners or adjectives, e.g. *the next hopeful*, *another facial*, *three empties*. The change of the category (from adjective to noun) is complete (cf. Huddleston 1984:325 ff.).

## 6. Recursive conversion

It is interesting to compare the following instances of converted nouns, attested in the *OED*:

- (27) a. The floor of the staircase was covered with *wet* and slime.  
 b. As the *dry* progressed and the heat remained constant, they stopped breeding.  
 c. A cupboard stood open full of *empties*.  
 d. There is a daily *slow*, stopping at all stations between Damascus and Deraa.
- (28) a. Rachel was going on to tell Jane to give her hair a *tidy*.  
 b. Give it a *clean* before returning it.  
 c. Soft, dry towelling that gives you a good, clean *dry* every single time.  
 d. She gave one *smooth* to her hair, and finally let in her visitor.

The nouns italicised in (27) can be roughly paraphrased as ‘something (an object or an abstract notion) which shows the property of being X’, e.g. *the dry* ‘the dry season’, *slow* ‘a slow train’. As was shown in section 5, this is the general meaning characteristic of adjectives converted into nouns.

The nouns italicised in (28), on the other hand, call for the paraphrase ‘an act of V-ing; a single instance of a process’. This sense group was identified in section 3 as typical of nouns zero-derived from verbs, such as *a kick*, *a push*, *a shove*. Moreover, the nouns *clean*, *dry*, *tidy* and *smooth* occur in (28) in the syntactic frame indicative of deverbal zero-derived nouns, namely they are a part of complex predicates, such as *give it a clean*. Complex predicates consist of a semantically ‘light’ (or underspecified) verb and a deverbal noun, e.g. *have a walk*, *take a look*, *give a shout*, *give someone a smile*, *do a jump*. As is shown in Cetnarowska (1993), they form a context in which innovative zero-derived deverbal verbs are very likely to occur. Such innovative products of verb-to-noun conversion can also follow the verb *need*, or complete the phrase *go for*, as exemplified in (29).

- (29) a. Those plates need a *dry*.  
 b. The room needs a good *clean* now.  
 c. I went for a quick wash and *tidy-up*.

The zero-derived nouns italicised in (28) and (29), e.g. *a dry* and *a clean*, represent thus a relatively rare phenomenon in English, namely the recursive application of conversion processes. The adjectives *dry* and *clean* are first converted into verbs which exhibit the meaning ‘to make sb/sth X’

or 'to become X'. Then the deadjectival verbs undergo conversion into nouns which denote single instances of an action or a process.

## 7. Conclusion

The present paper considered the phenomenon of conversion in English focusing on two types in which the input is an adjective: adjective-to-verb conversion and adjective-to-noun conversion. It was shown that these two types of processes exhibit distinct restrictions. Conversion of adjectives into verbs is unlikely to occur when the adjective is morphologically complex. Conversion of adjectives into nouns, on the other hand, is common with adjectival bases which terminate in suffixes such as *-ive*, *-ic*, *-al*, *-ant* etc. Moreover, while the status of adjective-to-verb conversion as a word-forming process is uncontroversial, the lexical status of adjective-to-verb conversion is put into question by some researchers (including Marchand 1969), who view it as a syntactic operation of deleting the head noun in a phrase consisting of an adjectival modifier and a head noun.

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